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Mapping the medieval city: plan analysis and urban history

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to provide a transferable methodology suitable for mapping the spatial development of medieval urban landscapes. Using the technique of 'plan analysis' the paper discusses some new evidence relating to the origins and development of Coventry, one of medieval England's more important provincial centres which rose to prominence during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The case study provides an opportunity to show how the plan analysis technique works and how it is of benefit to urban historians, as well as archaeologists and geographers.

Since the first publication of M.R.G. Conzen's detailed plan analysis of Alnwick in 1960, geographers, archaeologists and historians in Britain and Ireland have shown an interest in using settlement morphology as a basis for mapping the historical evolution of medieval urban landscapes.[1] Much of this work has, however, been focused on minor urban centres, especially small market towns, and also, to some extent, rural settlements. Although Conzen's plan analysis has been used to map the spatial development of a number of medieval settlements in both Britain and Ireland, surprisingly few large medieval towns and cities have been the subject of detailed plan analyses in the manner he suggested.[2] In this context, this paper provides an account of the usefulness of plan analysis

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[1] M.R.G. Conzen, *Alnwick, Northumberland: A Study in Town Plan Analysis* (London, 1960; reissued with glossary, 1969); M. Aston and C.J. Bond, *The Landscape of Towns* (London, 1976); N.P. Brooks and G. Whittington, 'Planning and growth in the medieval Scottish burgh: the example of St Andrews', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 2 (1977), 278–95; T.R. Slater, 'Medieval new town and port: a plan-analysis of Hedon, East Yorkshire', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 57 (1985), 23–41; J. Bradley, 'The role of town-plan analysis in the study of the medieval Irish town', in T.R. Slater (ed.), *The Built Form of Western Cities* (Leicester, 1990), 38–58; N.J. Baker and T.R. Slater, 'Morphological regions in English medieval towns', in J.W.R. Whitehand and P.J. Larkham (eds), *Urban Landscapes: International Perspectives* (London, 1992), 43–68.

[2] Soon to be published is a comparative study of Worcester and Gloucester that uses detailed plan analyses alongside archaeological and historical research: N.J. Baker and R.A. Holt, *Medieval Towns and the Church: The Growth of Worcester and Gloucester* (Aldershot, forthcoming 2000). A project currently being undertaken by the present author, funded by the British Academy, is concerned with the morphology of medieval Bristol and Norwich.

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for mapping the spatial development of medieval cities by focusing on one example, Coventry. The aim is to outline how the medieval plan-form of Coventry relates to the historical development of the city, and how a study of urban form not only provides a way of mapping the various stages that together create an urban landscape, but helps with unravelling the complex processes that shaped townscapes in the Middle Ages. In this context, the usefulness of plan analysis extends far beyond the case of Coventry and it should be seen that there is great potential in using urban morphology as a means of mapping the spatial development of Europe's medieval towns and cities.

Coventry in the Middle Ages was an important provincial centre situated on a route shown by Gough's map connecting London with Chester.[3] Like some other large provincial centres in medieval England, such as Bristol and Norwich, Coventry had no Roman precursor. Indeed, the origins of Coventry are obscure since it emerges as a prosperous urban centre only in post-Conquest written sources. By the end of the fourteenth century it had become an incorporated city ranking fourth in the urban hierarchy of England after London, York and Bristol.[4] The mid-sixteenth century apparently saw a downturn in Coventry's fortunes, however. In his *Itinerary*, Leland noted how the 'glory of the city decayeth', but it was this hiatus in the development of Coventry, and the effects of small-scale industrialization through the nineteenth century, that provided the city with a rich legacy of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century timber-framed, vernacular buildings.[5] At the end of the nineteenth century, in her book, *Life in an Old English Town*, Mary Dormer Harris compared the beauty of 'medieval' Coventry with Nuremberg in Germany.[6] However, the twentieth century dealt a cruel blow to both cities and their medieval heritage. Although redevelopment of Coven-

[3] See J.F. Edwards and B.P. Hindle, 'The transportation system of medieval England and Wales', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17 (1991), 124–34; B.P Hindle, *Medieval Roads* (Aylesbury, 1989), 18, 44.

[4] On the non-Roman origins of Coventry, Bristol and Norwich, see M.D. Lobel (ed.), *Historic Towns II* (Oxford, 1975), essays by J.C. Lancaster, E.M. Carus-Wilson and J. Campbell. On aspects of Coventry's economic and social history in the Middle Ages, see P.R. Coss, 'Coventry before incorporation: a re-interpretation', *Midland History*, 2 (1974); R.H.C. Davis, *The Early History of Coventry*, Dugdale Society Occasional Paper, 24 (1976); A. Gooder and E. Gooder, 'Coventry before 1355: unity or division?', *Midland History*, 6 (1981), 1–38; P.R. Coss (ed.), *The Early Records of Medieval Coventry* (London, 1986), xv–xlii. In 1377, 4,817 people contributed to the Poll Tax in Coventry, compared to 6,345 in Bristol and 7,248 in York: A. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns, 1400–1640* (London, 1991), 64.

[5] *The Itinerary of John Leland in England and Wales*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, 4 vols (London, 1907–9), vol. 3, 531–2; J. Prest, *The Industrial Revolution in Coventry* (Oxford, 1960). On timber-framed buildings in Coventry, see F.W.B. Charles, 'The timber-framed buildings of Coventry', *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*, 86 (1974), 113–31.

[6] M. Dormer Harris, *Life in an Old English Town: A History of Coventry From Earliest Times Compiled From Official Records* (London, 1898); also idem, *Dr Troughton's Sketches of Old Coventry* (Coventry, n.d.).

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try's city centre occurred both before and after the Second World War, an aerial bombardment in 1940 resulted in a fire that destroyed many buildings dating back to the Middle Ages, including the church of St Michael, Coventry's second cathedral. In the 1950s the comprehensive redevelopment of central Coventry proceeded apace without systematic archaeological excavation, and the design for the new city made little reference to its past.[7]

The origin and development of medieval Coventry is not only enigmatic, therefore, but the vestiges of the city's medieval past have been lost. These factors make it all the more difficult to map the spatial development of medieval Coventry. It is the purpose of this paper to show how by using Conzen's plan analysis technique a map of a medieval city can be re-created, even where its history and archaeology are elusive.

The foundations of plan analysis

The principle guiding Conzen's approach is that the form of streets and plots revealed on a large-scale plan of a given settlement provide in themselves clues about their origin and development. His work encompassed rather small and well-preserved medieval towns in England and Wales in the 1950s and 1960s, at a time when W.G. Hoskins was also writing on the idea that the landscape was a 'palimpsest', an unwritten record of environmental and cultural change which could be interpreted and read using a combination of field work and map analysis.[8] Likewise in the 1960s, M.W. Beresford used urban topography to identify towns which he thought had been deliberately 'planted' in the Middle Ages in England and elsewhere in Europe.[9] Between them, Conzen, Hoskins and Beresford shared much common ground: they shared an interest in understanding the physical development of medieval towns and they shared a common belief that the histories of medieval towns could be written using modern maps, coupled with aerial photographs and field work. When it came to medieval urbanism, all three were also mainly interested in smaller towns, rather than large cities of medieval origin.

[7] See J.M. Diefendorfer, *Rebuilding Europe's Bombed Cities* (London, 1990); P. Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities* (Edinburgh, 1966).

[8] Conzen, *Alnwick*, 47, note 44, acknowledges W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London, 1955). See also idem, *Fieldwork in Local History* (London, 1967), 66, 72. Hoskins and Conzen were both present at the conference on urban history held in 1965 at Leicester, the papers of which were published. See M.R.G. Conzen, 'The use of town plans in the study of urban history', in H.J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History* (Leicester, 1968), 113–30, and the comments on the discussion of Conzen's paper, 150–1.

[9] M.W. Beresford, *The New Towns of the Middle Ages* (Lutterworth, 1967); also M.W. Beresford and J.K.S. St Joseph, *Medieval England: An Aerial Survey* (Cambridge, 1958), 155–226; M.W. Beresford, *History on the Ground* (London, 1957), 125–49. In Beresford, *New Towns*, 470, reference is made to a private communication with Conzen concerning the origins of Alnwick.

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Although Conzen examined the morphogenesis of Newcastle upon Tyne in some detail, in his demonstration of how plan analysis could make a contribution to urban history he contented himself with using Ludlow and Conwy as examples.[10] Latterly he focused on Ludlow altogether.[11] Beresford, too, in his *New Towns of the Middle Ages*, chose to look at the topography of smaller medieval towns, especially decayed boroughs such as New Winchelsea and Newtown (on the Isle of Wight) with their relict urban landscapes.[12] Much of this foundational work on the physical development of medieval towns thus bypassed some of the less visually attractive and more heavily redeveloped modern cities of medieval origin.

Following the work of Conzen, Beresford and Hoskins, during the 1970s and 1980s a number of historical geographers, as well as archaeologists and to a lesser extent historians, used early town plans and field work as a basis to reconstruct the development of medieval towns in Britain and Ireland. Some followed Conzen's initial ideas about plan analysis more closely than others, making use of his specialist language of 'plan analysis' to define 'plan units' and 'morphological regions'.[13] Indeed, the technical vocabulary of Conzen's plan analysis approach is rather unnerving, but in essence his approach is quite straightforward to grasp. He found that by taking a large-scale plan of a town, for example, a first edition Ordnance Survey plan of the late nineteenth century, it was possible to identify what he termed three 'plan elements', these being streets, plots and buildings.[14] These plan elements, when they are removed from the Ordnance Survey plan (by tracing them), reveal different patterns of plots and streets. Conzen's idea was to take the form, or morphology, of these different patterns as evidence for revealing the historical plan-development, or morphogenesis, of medieval towns. Most medieval towns are actually composite in form, being comprised of morphologically-distinct patterns of streets and plots.[15] In the 1950s and 1960s, whilst Conzen was preparing his monograph on Alnwick, similar work was taking place on the physical development of medieval towns in Germany and Austria. In Austria, for example, Klaar made use of street patterns and plot patterns to deduce a chronology for small

[10] On Newcastle, see M.R.G. Conzen, 'The plan analysis of an English city centre', in K. Norberg (ed.), *Proceedings of the IGU Symposium in Urban Geography* (Lund, 1962), 383–414; on Ludlow and Conwy, see Conzen, 'Use of town plans', 122–30.

[11] M.R.G. Conzen, 'Morphogenesis, morphological regions and secular human agency in the historic townscape, as exemplified by Ludlow', in D. Denecke and G. Shaw (eds), *Urban Historical Geography* (Cambridge, 1988), 253–72.

[12] Beresford, *New Towns*, 14–28, 290–2.

[13] For example, Slater and Baker, 'Morphological regions'; Aston and Bond, *Landscape of Towns*, 81–3; see also B.P. Hindle, *The Study of Medieval Town Plans with special reference to Shropshire*, University of Salford Discussion Papers in Geography, 14 (1981).

[14] Conzen, *Alnwick*, 3–5.

[15] T.R. Slater, 'English medieval new towns with composite town plans: evidence from the Midlands', in idem, *The Built Form of Western Cities*, 60–82.

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twelfth- and thirteenth-century market towns such as Eferding and Krems.[16]

The notion that nineteenth-century town plans may be used to derive maps showing the chronological development of medieval towns found wide appeal. However, despite the growing acceptance of Conzen's approach since the 1960s, an explicit statement on the methodology of plan analysis has been absent, and so too has a demonstration of the historical validity of this technique. Should a plan of streets and plots derived from nineteenth-century cartographic sources be used to map the physical development of a medieval town? During the 1970s, archaeological excavations in towns and cities in Britain began to produce evidence that, in certain cases, boundary walls shown *in situ* on plans of nineteenth- and twentieth-century date could be traced back to the Middle Ages, sometimes even as early as the tenth or eleventh centuries.[17] This was found to be the case at York, Norwich, Bristol, Lincoln and at Winchester: in other words at large medieval and modern urban centres, where it might otherwise be thought that centuries of intensive development on the same site would have removed earlier features such as plot boundaries. In effect, then, property demarcations once put in place are remarkably enduring features in the urban landscape. But just because one plot boundary in one part of a city survived for half a millennia does not necessarily mean that other plot boundaries shown on nineteenth-century plans are equally as ancient. Neither does a long-surviving plot boundary in itself help reveal how the surrounding townscape had developed during the Middle Ages. Archaeological and historical evidence of the medieval urban landscape needs to be interpreted by placing it within its spatial context. This spatial context is suitably provided by Conzen's plan analysis technique.

Often the archeological record of medieval streets, plots and buildings precedes contemporary written accounts of urban property.[18] In a sense, the earliest development of many medieval cities is 'prehistoric', emerging only later in detailed documents such as property charters and rentals of the late twelfth or thirteenth centuries. However, as Keene has shown, where early accounts of property do exist, as they do for Winchester, it is possible to reconstruct spatial patterns of urban property and temporal changes in the nature of medieval property holding.[19] This approach often reveals the inherent conservatism of the urban landscape – its propensity to fossilize medieval patterns of streets and property boundaries, at least until the time when accurate cartographic surveys were carried out in the nineteenth century under the Ordnance Survey.

[16] A. Klaar, 'Die siedslungsformen der Österreichen Donaustädte', in W. Rausch (ed.), *Die Städte Mitteleuropas im 12 und 13 Jahrhundert* (Linz, 1963), 93–116.
[17] See P. Ottaway, *Archaeology in British Towns* (London, 1994), 149, 173; J. Schofield and A. Vince, *Medieval Towns* (London, 1995), 63–9, 76–85.
[18] *Ibid*., 3.
[19] D. Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1985).

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But in themselves the earliest written accounts of property, and of streets and urban institutions, only record the time when, for whatever reason, it was found necessary to put information about them down in writing, and such records cannot always provide the date when a certain street or set of properties were first established. In Norwich, for example, excavations at the Alms Lane site revealed the presence of timber structures in the twelfth century, a hundred years before the properties were first recorded in surviving deeds and charters.[20] Likewise, in Coventry, along Much Park Street, archaeological evidence of occupation was found to date from the later twelfth century whereas the earliest evidence for properties on the same site came from deeds dating to the early thirteenth century.[21]

Of course, in combination the evidence of property records and archaeological excavations can provide a very comprehensive account of the historical development of an urban landscape; but clearly not all plots or streets in a modern city can be excavated, and only certain areas will be well represented by written records, depending on who held the land in the Middle Ages and how the documents have survived since. Again, therefore, a spatial context within which to place this fragmentary evidence is required; a spatial context that will enable evidence from different areas of a town or city to be compared and interpreted. Conzen's plan analysis provides such a context. To demonstrate how historical evidence can be tied into a plan analysis the remaining part of the paper will focus on Coventry as a case study.

Coventry was selected as a case study in order to test Conzen's approach precisely because the city has an obscure medieval history and few surviving remains of its past.[22] To explain how Conzen's methodology was used and adapted, the analysis of Coventry's plan will be outlined here in two closely related sections. The following two parts of the paper will take the reader through the plan analysis in the sequence that it was undertaken, reflecting at the same time on the difficulties involved in undertaking a plan analysis and offering some direction on how to resolve these difficulties. After this, in the final part, an interpretation of Coventry's medieval morphogenesis will be offered on the basis of morphological, historical and archaeological evidence. Clearly though, in the context of this paper, this interpretation will have to be brief.

[20] M.W. Atkin and A. Carter, 'Excavations in Norwich – 1976/7. The Norwich Survey – Sixth Interim Report', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 36 (1977), 289; M. Atkin, 'Excavations in Alms Lane', in M. Atkin, A. Carter and D.H. Evans (eds), 'Excavations in Norwich 1971–78, Part II', *East Anglian Archaeology*, 26 (1985), 144–260.

[21] S.M. Wright, 'Much Park Street, Coventry: the development of a medieval street. Excavations 1970–4', *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*, 92 (1985), 1–133.

[22] The following part of the paper is based on a methodological discussion in the author's doctoral thesis: see K.D. Lilley, 'Medieval Coventry: a study in town plan analysis' (unpublished University of Birmingham Ph.D. thesis, 1995), 56–146.

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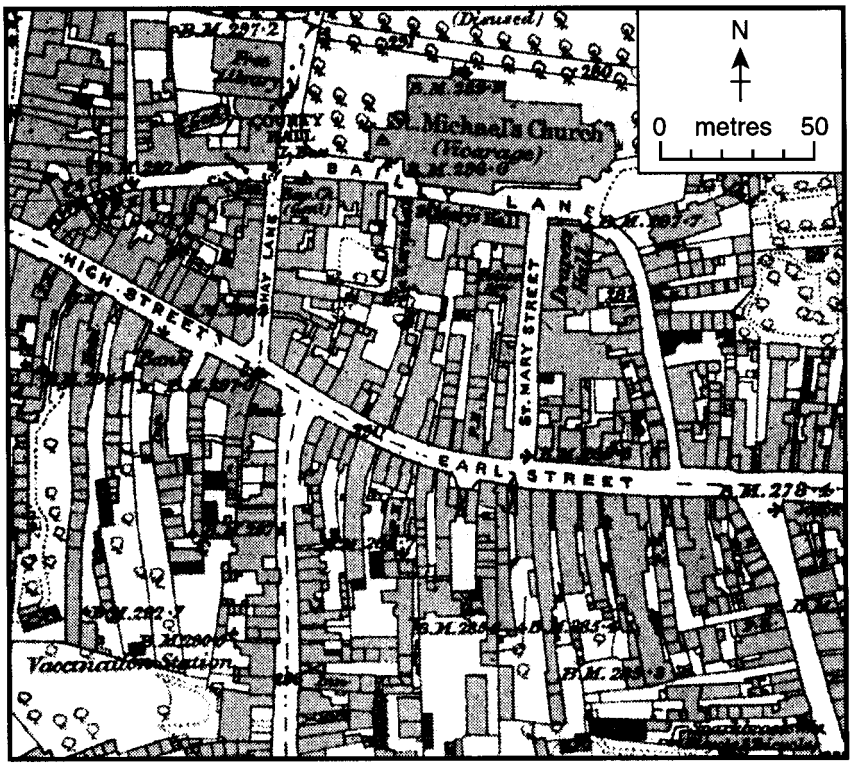


Figure 1: Part of the First Edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey plan of Coventry (1889)

A methodological outline of 'plan analysis'

The following is an outline of the methodological procedure for the plan analysis technique. First, a base *town plan* is prepared. This is derived using the earliest, most accurately surveyed and detailed cadastral plan of a town, which in Britain and Ireland is usually an Ordnance Survey plan of either 1:2500 or 1:500 scale (Figure 1). From the Ordnance Survey plan only the town's morphological 'skeleton' is required, which means tracing off street and plot patterns to create the base plan (Figure 2). Although large-scale Ordnance Survey plans were first surveyed only from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Victorian towns and cities usually preserved an inherited plan-form of much greater antiquity.[23] However, in this period of great industrialization and urbanization inherited urban forms were under particular threat. From maps and plans pre-dating the Ordnance Survey plan it is possible to identify areas where modern redevelopment such as new streets, railways and factories

[23] Conzen, 'Morphogenesis, morphological regions'.

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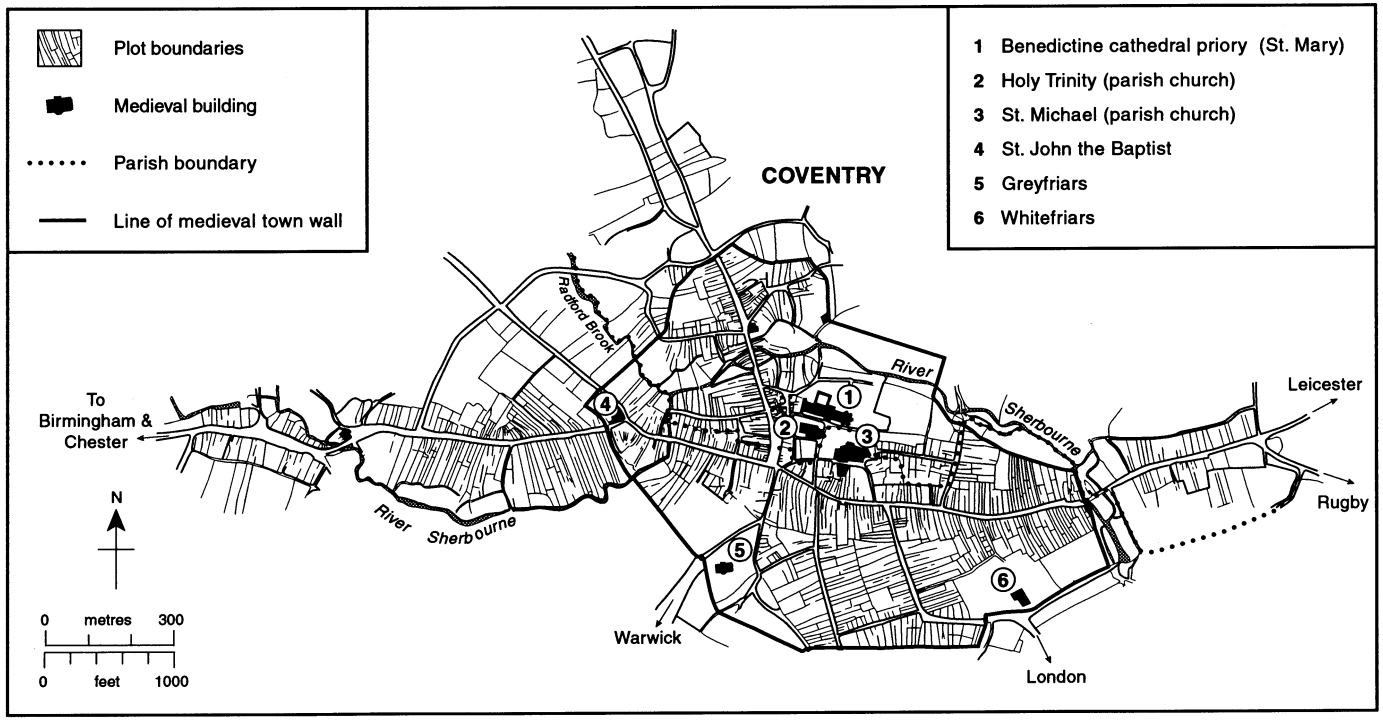


Figure 2: Coventry's town plan

had disrupted earlier patterns of streets and plots, and in such cases the form of affected streets and plots is added to the base town plan. On the whole, though, Ordnance Survey plans are relied upon as far as possible because of their detailed and accurate cartography. With only street and plot patterns showing on the base plan (together with surviving medieval structures such as churches and town walls), the form of a town can be analysed further.

The second stage in the plan analysis process involves defining what Conzen termed 'plan units'. This is the stage when the plots and streets derived from the Ordnance Survey plan are carefully examined in terms of their form (size, shape and orientation, for example) to see whether in fact they share similar morphological characteristics. Plots and streets which display morphological coherence are used to define the plan units, the boundaries of which are termed 'plan seams'. Following Conzen's approach, the plan units are numbered sequentially with Roman numerals, and named (see Figure 3). To examine whether these plan units reflect particular phases or stages in the medieval morphogenesis of an urban landscape, each individual plan unit is used as the basis for analysing historical evidence.

The third stage of the process involves carefully integrating historical material by mapping it on to the town plan. Using medieval deeds and rentals to piece together sequences of urban property patterns, as well as evidence derived from archaeological reports, an attempt is made to *locate* topographical and toponymical information that specifically relates to the medieval urban landscape, tying verifiable medieval townscape-features with morphological patterns of streets and plots. This historical and archaeological evidence is then interpreted to provide a relative chronology for the medieval topographical and toponymical features within each plan unit. This requires using the already mapped historical evidence to *date* certain morphological and topographical features, such as defences, ditches and buildings. By the end of this stage, the morphological history of each plan unit has been carefully mapped, (i) to show the likely form of the medieval townscape (in terms of its streets and plots, with selected buildings); and (ii) to show what morphological changes took place within the plan unit during the Middle Ages.

Finally, in stage four, the individual plan units and their morphological histories are all pieced together to create a map of the changing form of the medieval urban landscape. This means interpreting, or reading, the plan units as a physical expression of the formation of an urban landscape, and at the same time it involves noting internal transformative changes within each of the plan units, taking care to recognize that townscapes change not only through outward cumulative expansion (accretion) but also through phases of impositionary growth (rebuilding). An attempt is therefore made at this final stage to interpret what the changing form of the medieval urban landscape represents. This is

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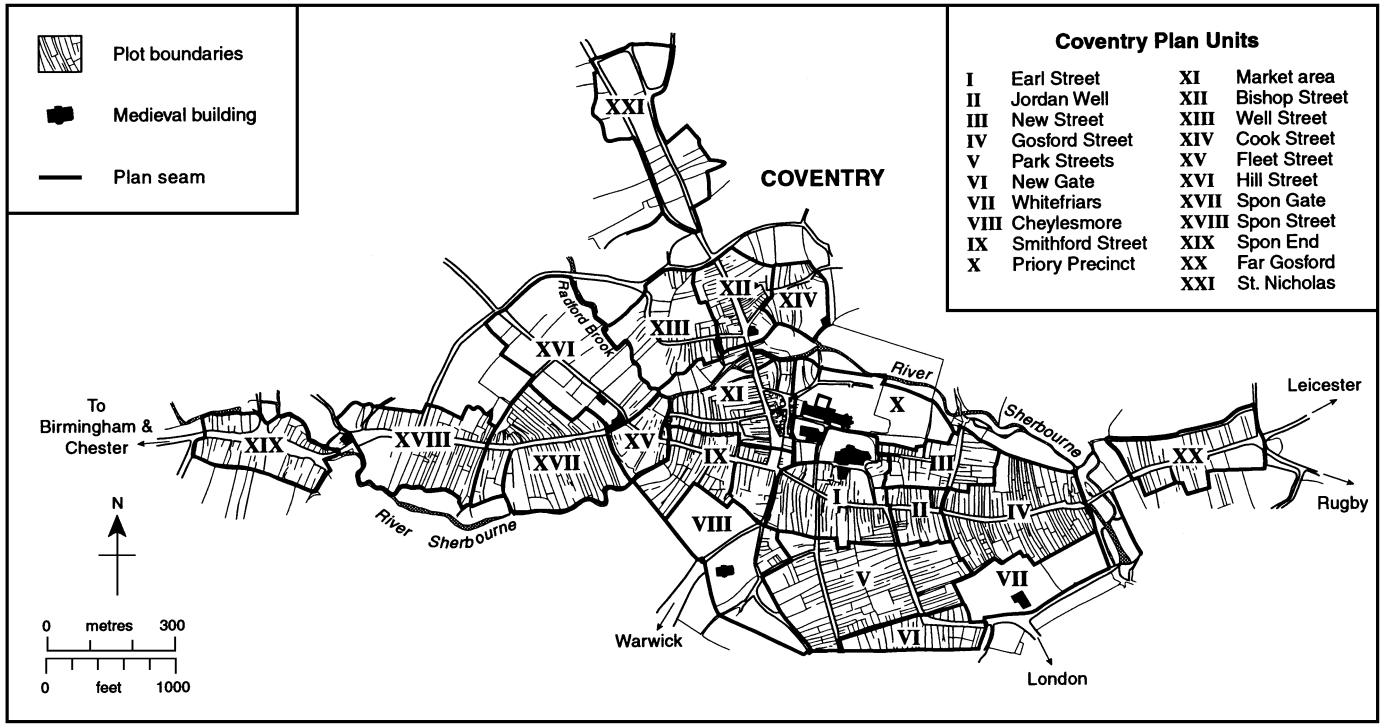


Figure 3: Coventry plan units

especially important in the context of the Middle Ages as so few contemporary sources actually tell us how and when urban landscapes were shaped. Morphological analysis coupled with cartographic representation thus provides a way of conceptualizing, measuring and interpreting the changing medieval urban landscape.

The practice of plan analysis: Coventry as a case study

In essence, the preceding methodological outline may appear rather straightforward, but in practice undertaking a plan analysis for the purposes of mapping the development of a medieval urban landscape does present some difficulties. For this reason in this section I shall go through more carefully some of the problems that have to be overcome when using plan analysis, and to this end I shall refer in particular to the case of Coventry.

It has to be said that Conzen unfortunately provided no guidance on how to select streets and plots from Ordnance Survey plans in order to create a base town plan.[24] The selection process is, in fact, unashamedly subjective, and relies on intuitive decision-making. It hinges on using one's own ability to identify and select morphological features, deciding whether or not certain plot boundaries should be included on the base plan, or excluded. Importantly, however, we should recognize that the production of such a plan is a reflexive and hermeneutic process, one in which many rough drafts are undertaken in the course of analysing a town's plan. Furthermore, drawing out morphological features from the Ordnance Survey plan engages the 'historical mind' (the term comes from Cole Harris),[25] for the act of tracing off patterns of streets and plots helps to put oneself in touch with not only the form of the urban landscape (that is its nuances, subtleties and signs), but also the creators of the urban landscape itself (the agents of townscape change), all of which helps in interpreting and understanding the historical significance of a particular town's plan-form. For James Corner, an American landscape architect, the act of drawing is 'eidetic' in the sense that it opens up creative possibilities, fuelling the imagination by encouraging a personal dialogue with a landscape. Only by drawing a landscape (and also walking through it) can one thoroughly get to know it, and with each redrawing in the search for patterns of plots and streets this subjective engagement becomes deeper and more meaningful. This phenomenological aspect of the plan analysis process has been somewhat overlooked by its practitioners, and yet it underlines the point that

[24] Conzen, *Alnwick*, 4–9, does not explicitly state how his plans were derived. See Baker and Slater, 'Morphological regions', 44–53.

[25] C. Harris, 'The historical mind and the practice of geography', in D. Ley and M.S. Samuels (eds), *Humanistic Geography: Prospects and Problems* (London, 1978), 123–37.

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plan analysis should be viewed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.[26]

The stage of analysis that calls for defining 'plan units' is also a difficult one for positivistic empiricists to handle, for it too relies on an awareness of the role of the self in the construction of knowledge, and draws upon subjectivity, intuition and reflexivity.[27] How plan units are defined will of course depend largely on the choices made in stage one, over which street and plot boundaries were included. On this subject Slater suggested that only 'primary plot-boundaries' should be used, that is those plot boundaries that show little or no deviation in their course from the street front to a back fence running across the plot at its tail.[28] In reality, though, as is clear from the 1:2500 plan of Coventry, there is a range of different forms of plot boundary, some short and some long, and so it seems safest to include as many as possible in a plan analysis (see Figures 1 and 2). The process of selecting plot boundaries and defining plan units is therefore no exact science, and neither should it be. Indeed, the selection of morphological features and the definition of plan units is a process that cannot easily be simply summarized in a few words or neatly conveyed as a series of mechanical procedures, but rather it is one that is picked up through the practice of drawing. In fact the base plan of Coventry (Figure 2) was redrawn afresh a number of times. With each redrawing the same morphological features and plan units were picked out, and the repeated activity of drawing the plan enables one continually to question why it is that a particular street or plot has the form that it has.

Questioning the definition of plan units is important, as it is on the basis of these morphologically-distinct areas that Conzen and others have mapped the historical evolution of English medieval towns, such as Ludlow and Hedon.[29] Guidance offered on how to 'date' plan units is minimal, however, and the reason why it is so crucial to clarify this issue is because plan units are so often taken to reflect periodic stages in the

[26] Here I am drawing on the epistomology of humanistic geography: see D. Livingstone and R. Harrison, 'Immanuel Kant, subjectivism, and human geography: a preliminary investigation', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s., 6 (1981), 359–74; D. Gregory, 'Human agency and human geography', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, n.s., 6 (1981), 1–18. For a discussion of the phenomenology of plan analysis see K.D. Lilley, 'Landscape mapping and symbolic form: drawing as a creative medium in cultural geography', in I. Cook, D. Crouch, S. Naylor and J. Ryan (eds), *Cultural Turns/ Geographical Turns: Perspectives on Cultural Geography* (London, forthcoming 2000). On drawing as an eidetic activity see J. Corner, 'Representation and landscape: drawing and making in the landscape medium', *Word & Image*, 8 (1992), 243–75.

[27] For the ways in which Conzen's ideas were developed by positivist geographers during the 1960s and 1970s, see J.W.R. Whitehand, 'Conzenian ideas: extension and development', in idem (ed.), *The Urban Landscape: Historical Development and Management* (London, 1981), 127–52. Conzen, *Alnwick*, 6–12, is rather elusive on the issue of defining plan units, but see idem, 'Use of town plans', 119–21, 124–7; also Baker and Slater, 'Morphological regions', 44–6, 49–53; Lilley, 'Medieval Coventry', 61–92.

[28] T.R. Slater, 'The analysis of burgage patterns in medieval towns', *Area*, 13 (1981), 211–16.

[29] Conzen, 'Use of town plans'; Slater, 'Medieval town and port'.

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morphogenesis, or plan-development, of a medieval town.[30] By identifying plan units, and conjecturing that these represent stages in the evolution of a medieval urban landscape, the plan analysis attempts to provide a 'moving' map, one that encapsulates changes over time as well as space.[31] However, plan units are only a key by which to unlock the evolution of a medieval urban landscape if they are used as the basis on which to map archaeological and historical information. To show this, in the following part of this discussion I shall focus on only one of Coventry's twenty-one plan units (Earl Street, numbered (I) on Figure 3). This will demonstrate how it is possible to validate and verify the historical authenticity of a plan unit. First, some discussion is needed about how the plan unit was defined and how it was then found to preserve the outlines of a twelfth-century defended 'castle-town'. Following this, consideration is given to how the area of this castle-town underwent transformative changes during the later Middle Ages, and how in spite of these changes it maintained morphological coherence until the time the Ordnance Survey mapped the area in the nineteenth century.

The backbone of Coventry's morphological 'skeleton' is formed by an axial street running approximately east-west. In all, nine plan units can be identified along this street (Figure 3). Along Earl Street itself (unit I) the form of plots is particularly distinctive (Figure 4). Between Greyfriar's Lane in the west to just beyond Much Park Street in the east, plots fronting the south side of Earl Street are deep and sinuous in form. On the north side of Earl Street the plots are similarly curving but they are rather shallower and extend up to a 'back lane' called Bailey Lane which runs around the south side of St Michael's, one of Coventry's two medieval parish churches (more about which later). It is possible to see within unit (I) other more subtle morphological variations, such as a small group of plots fronting Bailey Lane. Slater terms such subtle internal differences in form, 'sub-units', and in the case of unit (I) some explanation is needed to account for the differences between the form of

[30] 'The recognition of distinct plan units is of great importance and can often illuminate the growth stages of a medieval town, especially earlier ones, when available written records fail to give any information': Conzen, 'Use of town plans', 120.

[31] Although no one had hitherto used Coventry's built form as a way of revealing the city's spatial and historical development, others have attempted to map the medieval city. The *Historic Towns Atlas* fascicle on Coventry, for example, which appeared in 1975, contains a series of maps showing the main medieval features of Coventry's urban landscape. As well as this there is a host of other publications that have maps purporting to show the medieval city, some relying on archaeological finds and others using mainly contemporary written records. However, the plans produced by the Victoria County History and by the *Historic Towns Atlas* (for example) are in every sense 'static', showing Coventry's layout at a certain time. See Lobel, *Historic Towns*, in particular map 4 following the essay by J.C. Lancaster, and the map of the 'walled city and its environs *c*.1500' in Stephens, *City of Coventry*, 9. For other examples of maps of medieval Coventry: M. Rylatt, *Coventry: Archaeology and Development* (Coventry, 1977); Coss, *Early Records*, map 1; Gooder and Gooder, 'Coventry before 1355'.

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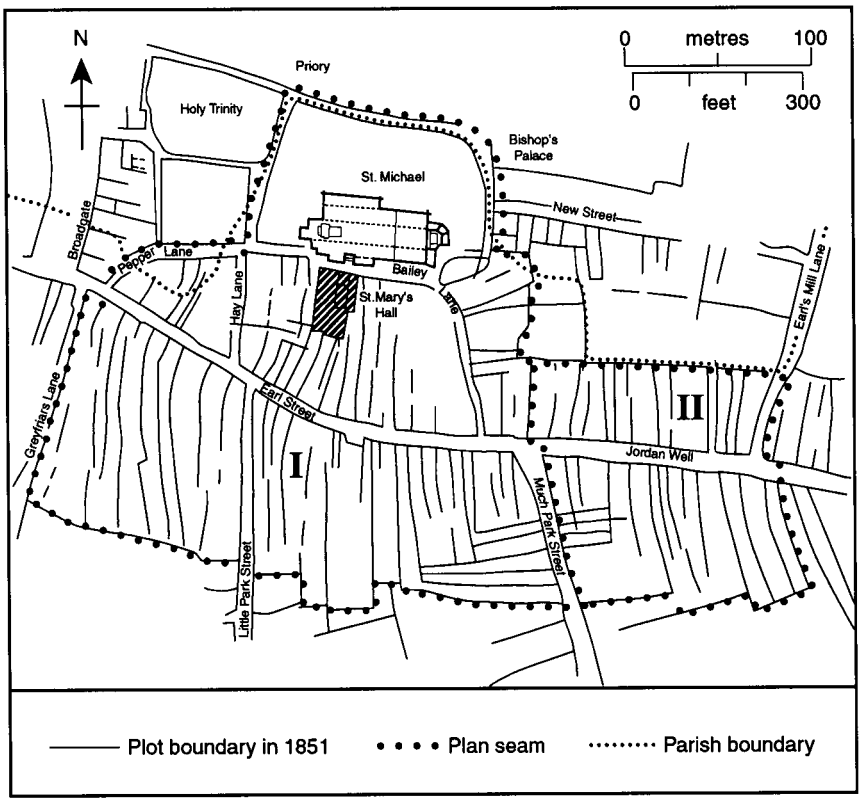


Figure 4: Plan unit (I): Earl Street

plots fronting Bailey Lane and those along Earl Street.[32] A range of factors could account for differences in urban form: changes in natural topography; different geographies of land ownership; the survival of antecedent features, such as field boundaries, but in the case of plan unit (I) the distinctive street and plot patterns are found to reflect a particular stage in the development of medieval Coventry. By mapping archaeological and historical evidence on to the plan of unit (I) it becomes possible not only to verify the historical validity of the Earl Street plan unit but confirm that adaptive transformations in the medieval townscape affected the morphological character of plots along Bailey Lane. To show this it is necessary to consider some aspects of topographical and toponymical evidence contained in the archaeological and documentary record.

In the 1970s and 1980s, excavations at different sites to the south of

[32] T.R. Slater, 'Doncaster's town plan: an analysis', in P.C. Buckland, J. Magilton and C. Hayfield (eds), *The Archaeology of Doncaster (2): The Medieval and Later Town*, British Archaeology Reports 202(1) (Oxford, 1989), 42–61.

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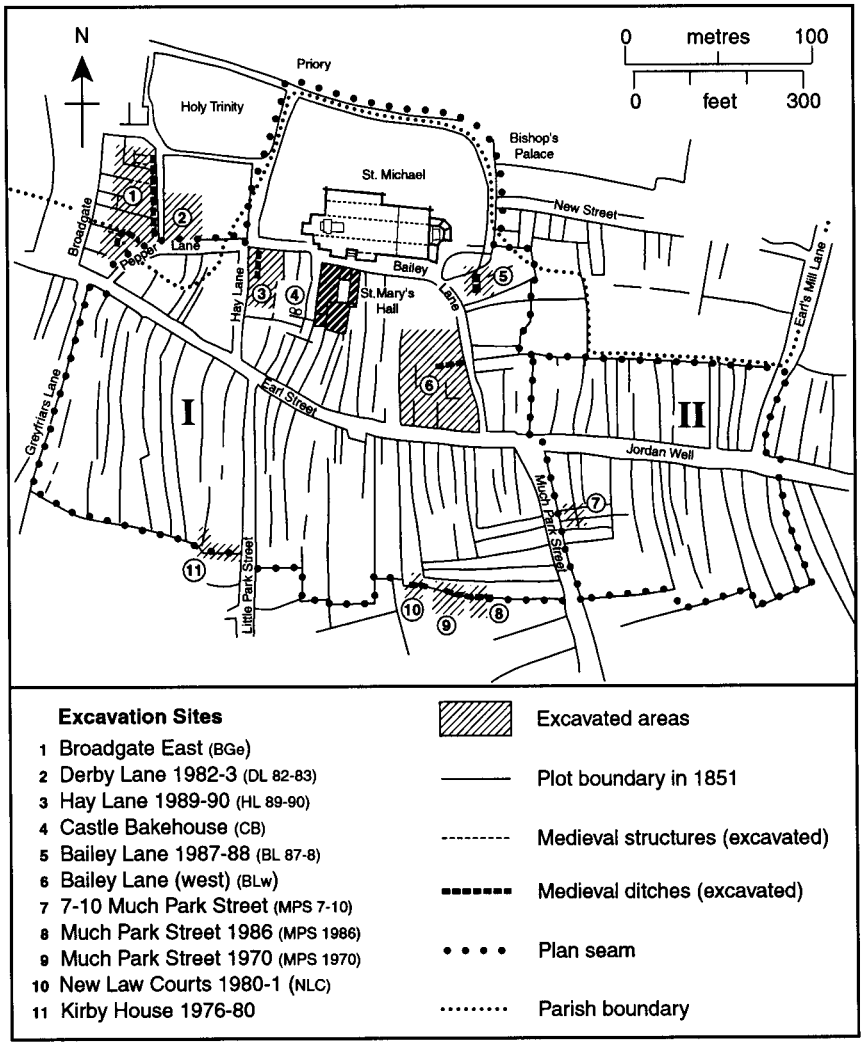


Figure 5: Archaeology and morphology of plan unit (I)

Earl Street revealed sections of ditch which were all found to share similar dimensions.[33] If the alignment and position of these sections of ditch are plotted against the pattern of plot boundaries they can be seen to form part of a linear defensive feature (Figures 4, 5 and 6). In particular, the course of the excavated ditches corresponds with the southern plan-seam (the boundary of units I and V). In the northern part of unit (I) excavations in the 1980s led to the discovery of further sections

[33] *West Midlands Archaeology*, 23 (1980), 83–4; 24 (1981), 61–3; 29 (1986), 70–1; Wright, 'Much Park Street', 11–13.

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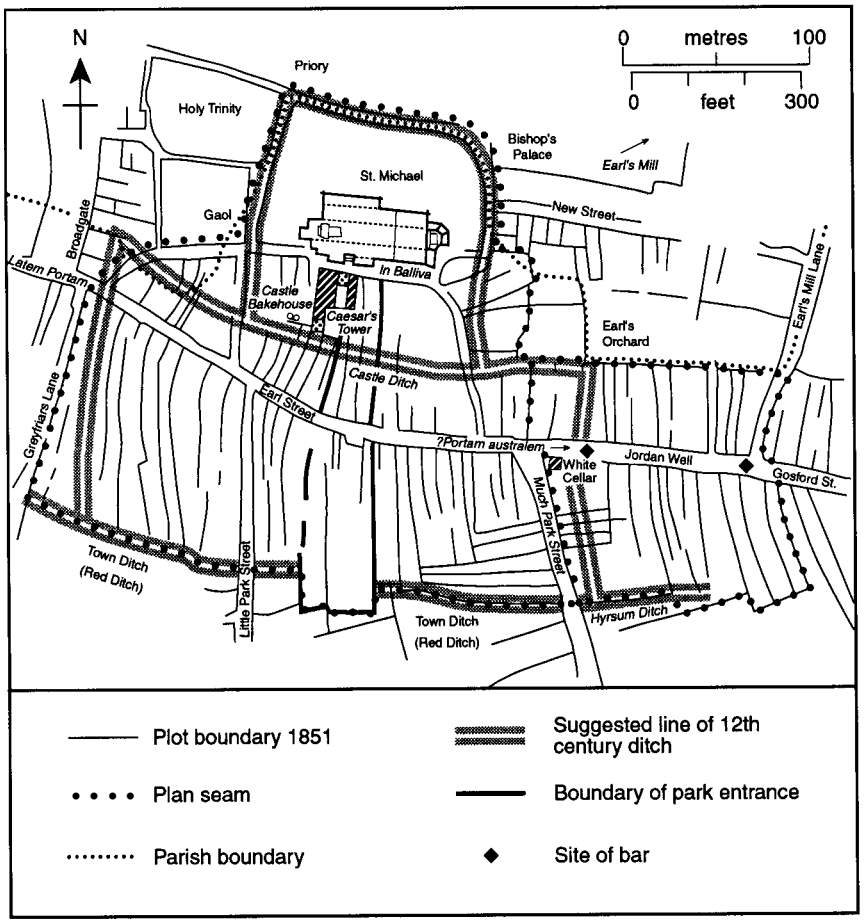


Figure 6: Earl Street, the castle-town and Bailey Lane

of ditch at sites close to Hay Lane and Bailey Lane (shown on Figure 5).[34] At three sites a deep and large ditch was found, much deeper than the one to the south of Earl Street. At Hay Lane the line of one ditch actually cut through Bailey Lane, showing that the street was a later feature than

[34] For the ditches see *West Midlands Archaeology*, 31 (1988), 44–5; 32 (1989), 95–6; also see M. Rylatt and M.A. Stokes (eds), *Excavations in Broadgate East, Coventry, 1974–5* (Coventry, 1994). Site plans from unpublished excavation reports were examined in the archive of the Coventry Museum Archaeological Unit (CMAU), thanks to the kindness of M. Rylatt and I. Soden. Accompanying many of the unpublished CMAU excavation reports are tenement histories compiled by N.W. Alcock. The following CMAU reports were consulted: 32–9 Bailey Lane (BLc); Bailey Lane (west side) (BLw); Hay Lane (HL89–90); Castle Bakehouse, Hay Lane (CB90); 9 Hay Lane (HL91). Published and unpublished site plans were used in the plan analysis (see Figure 5), in particular the following: Rylatt and Stokes, *Excavations in Broadgate East*; Wright, 'Much Park Street'; and from brief reports in *West Midlands Archaeology*, 23 (1980), 83–4; 24 (1981), 61–4; 30 (1987), 64; 31 (1988), 44; 32 (1989), 95–6; 33 (1990), 92–4.

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the ditch.[35] Again, once plotted against the pattern of plots and streets, these separate sections of ditch begin to make sense (Figure 6). One ditch ran north-south, in line with the western boundary of St Michael's churchyard. Another ran east-west from Bailey Lane, in line with the back fence of plots behind Earl Street, and in line with the south side of St Mary's Hall (a guildhall of fourteenth-century date). In turn, this same east-west alignment connects with a curious southward deviation in the boundary separating the parishes of St Michael and Holy Trinity, Coventry's only medieval parishes. This deflection mirrors a sharply angled section of ditch excavated east of Broadgate in the 1970s.[36]

By interpolating between the alignments of the known sections of exposed ditch, and relating them to patterns of neighbouring plot and parish boundaries, the ditches in the vicinity of Earl Street can be seen to relate to one another (Figure 6). The ditches form a unified defended-feature comprising a smaller, square-shaped enclosure (around St Michael's church), and a larger rectangular enclosure (which encompasses plots fronting on to Earl Street). The overall outline of the two adjoining enclosures corresponds, more or less, with the plan-seams of unit (I). Nevertheless, the relationship between Bailey Lane and the two enclosures needs to be clarified, for they are clearly juxtaposed. In order to understand the historical context of the adjoining enclosures, and to make sense of the apparent townscape changes associated with Bailey Lane, the features mapped from the archaeological record need to be dated and interpreted alongside further topographical and toponymical evidence taken from contemporary written records, especially thirteenth-century property deeds.

Archaeologists were able to date the deeper ditches in the northern part of plan unit (I) to the middle part of the twelfth century, but the ditches seem to have been short-lived as they showed signs of having been deliberately infilled towards the end of the same century. As these ditches were up to eight metres in depth (and about the same in breadth), they were clearly quite considerable, and therefore surely defensive in purpose.[37] It may be that the twelfth-century date is conservative because if the ditches were deepened by using an existing

[35] See CMAU archive report for Hay Lane excavations (HL89–90), and *West Midlands Archaeology*, 33 (1990), 94.

[36] See Rylatt and Stokes, *Excavations in Broadgate East*. The position of the ditches east of Broadgate shown in Figure 5 are taken from plans in the CMAU archive (site code BGe75).

[37] According to excavation reports, the deep ditch found at sites in Pepper Lane, Hay Lane and Bailey Lane had started silting up by the later twelfth century and was deliberately infilled by *c*. 1200. Pits with thirteenth-century material were found cut into the upper fill of feature F25 (the angled-ditch) in the Broadgate East excavations, and the fill of the ditch west of Bailey Lane. F25 cut through a smaller ditch which contained material of pre-mid-twelfth-century date, suggesting that the large ditch had been cut in *c*. 1150. The implication, then, is that the northern ditch alignment was a relatively short-lived feature. See CMAU archive reports HL89–90, BLw and BGe75; *West Midlands Archaeology*, 31 (1988), 44–5; 32 (1989), 95–6; Rylatt and Stokes, *Excavations in Broadgate East*.

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alignment then earlier material might have been lost. Written accounts of a 'castle ditch' first appear as late as 1290 in two property deeds that both relate to a property on the north side of Earl Street which extended as far as the 'castle ditch'.[38] By this time the northern ditches had long been filled in and so it must be that the two deeds recall a property boundary that had once respected the former ditch, the alignment of which was east-west. Indeed, fourteenth-century buildings on the west side of Bailey Lane were found to have stone foundations which had subsided over an infilled ditch, again on an east-west alignment.[39] This evidence clearly shows that an east-west ditch known as the 'castle ditch' had been present in the twelfth century to the north of Earl Street, and that subsequently it had been infilled; but whereabouts was the castle itself? Answering this question involves looking more closely at the appearance of Bailey Lane and the townscape changes in the northern part of plan unit (I).

There is evidence that the east-west castle ditch ran to the south of the castle. In an excavation adjacent to the west wall of St Mary's Hall the remains of bread ovens were found, the earliest dating to the early thirteenth century.[40] They were situated on a property which was still called the 'castle bakehouse' as late as the early fifteenth century.[41] As the ovens lay just north of the 'castle ditch' alignment, it is most likely that the squarish enclosure to the north of properties fronting Earl Street represents the castle site. Both St Mary's Hall and St Michael's church would therefore have been within the castle area. The church is first recorded in 1153 when Ranulf II, earl of Chester, gave it and its chapelries to Prior Lawrence of St Mary's in Coventry.[42] Bailey Lane, to the south of St Michael's, is first referred to in the early thirteenth century when properties there were simply stated to lie *in balivum*, 'in the bailey'.[43] It

[38] In 1293–97 a property deed granting a messuage in Earl Street refers to the *fossatum castelli* on the north side of the property and the *via regia que vocatur via comitis* on the south. The adjacent property on the east side belonged to Richard de la Mure in the 1280s. A deed of about the same date refers to *le Casteldich*, again with Richard as the adjacent property-holder. These two deeds help confirm that the castle ditch did, indeed, lie on the north side of Earl Street. They are the only property deeds that mention the castle (see Coss, *Early Records*, deeds 222, 223 and 226). Properties on the north side of Earl Street clearly once stopped short of Bailey Lane.

[39] CMAU archive report for Bailey Lane west (BLw); see also *West Midlands Archaeology*, 32 (1989), 95–6.

[40] The so-called Castle Bakehouse site (CMAU archive CB90): *West Midlands Archaeology*, 33 (1990), 92–4. The excavation report states that three bakehouses were found on the same site, the earliest comprising two large, circular stone ovens.

[41] In 1410–11, the Pittancer's rental in the Register of the Cathedral Priory of St Mary includes a reference to 'one tenement with appurtenances called *Castelbachous*, with all the gate and free entry and carriage to the same tenement with carts and fuel for the common oven belonging to it from ancient times': see A.E. Gooder, J. Hunt, J. Steel and C. Walker (eds), *The Pittancer's Rental* (Birmingham, 1973), 22. The excavation report contains a detailed account of the fifteenth-century property pattern for this area.

[42] Coss, *Early Records*, 11–12.

[43] The earliest reference to Bailey Lane in property records is in the first quarter of the thirteenth century when it is referred to as *viam Bailey* (*c.* 1215–25) and *viculum qui*

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seems, then, that Bailey Lane ran across the site of the castle and was perhaps first pushed through into the castle enclosure when the site had ceased to be used for a military role. Judging by date of the fill of the northern ditches, the castle must have been abandoned by *c*. 1200, leaving an open site for new property development, for which purpose Bailey Lane presumably was created.[44] This centrally positioned area must have looked attractive to those wishing to take up properties in thirteenth-century Coventry, and no doubt for this reason we find evidence of the first properties along Bailey Lane soon after the demise of the castle.

If the small squarish enclosure represents a castle, what does the rectangular ditched enclosure to the south represent? Although excavations proved that the southern ditch alignment was shallower than its northern counterpart, both were found to share the same mid-twelfth-century date (though similarly the southern ditch may have an earlier origin). Furthermore, the southern alignment was successively re-used as a ditch and so, unlike the castle ditch, it survived during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, eventually to become a substantial stone-lined culvert.[45] Apart from differences in the dimensions of the two ditches they also have a different toponymy. The name 'castle ditch' only appears in deeds relating to properties north of Earl Street, whereas the ditch to the south is called variously the 'town ditch', the 'common ditch', and the Red Ditch, in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century records.[46] The latter is due in part perhaps to the colour of the ditch (it was dug through red soil and later lined in red sandstone),[47] but the other two names (which are earlier) suggest that the southern ditch served as town defences first and foremost, and *not* a castle ditch. The plots along the length of Earl Street, that is within plan unit (I), all lie within this rectilinear ditch-system (Figure 6). At the western end of Earl Street is Broadgate (*latam portam*), the street-name suggesting a former

vocatur le Baille (the 'way called the bailey'). In the 1220s a 'land' was recorded situated *in Balliva*: see Coss, *Early Records*, deeds 176, 767.9, 767.20, 767.22.

[44] According to Stephens (*Coventry*, 18), 'some time before 1250, the earl of Chester moved his seat to Cheylesmore, allowing the castle to decay, and to be let out into tenements'.

[45] Stretches of the southern ditch were excavated at three separate sites in the 1980s. See *West Midlands Archaeology*, 23 (1980), 83–4; 24 (1981), 61–3; 29 (1986), 70–1; Wright, 'Much Park Street', 11–13. The earliest material found in the ditch was dated to the middle of the twelfth century, after which the ditch was apparently allowed to silt-up.

[46] In 1289 the tenement of Nicholas Lythulf extended from Earl Street 'to the common ditch of the vill of Coventry' (*com(m)une(m) fossatu(m) ville de Coventr'*). Another property, belonging to Henry le Noreys in the 1270s, extended up to the 'town ditch' (*fossatum ville*), and lay on the south side of Earl Street close to Park Street. Subsequently, the town ditch became known as the Red Ditch, as a deed of 1347 makes clear, whilst a ditch known as the 'hyrsum ditch' in 1250 appears to have been an eastward section of the latter, running behind properties fronting Jordan Well (*hyrsum* is Old English for 'obedient'). This stretch of ditch clearly ran east-west. See Coss, *Early Records*, deeds 185, 217, 237; P.R. Coss (ed.), *The Langley Cartulary*, Dugdale Society, Main Series 22 (1980), deed 232; also Wright, 'Much Park Street', 31.

[47] See *West Midlands Archaeology*, 24 (1981), 61–2.

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entrance-gate into the enclosure; whilst at the opposite end of the street to Broadgate a second gate is suggested by a mid-twelfth-century reference to *portam australem* which might refer to an entrance from the south.[48]

The area of Earl Street has long been thought of as the most likely site of Coventry's castle and its fleeting appearance in written records and its curious disappearance has baffled local historians and archaeologists alike.[49] As long ago as 1951 it had been suggested that Coventry castle was represented by the outline of Bailey Lane and Earl Street, the two streets forming what appeared to be the classic motte-and-bailey shape associated with Norman castles (see Figures 3 and 4).[50] Until now this view has remained more or less unchallenged, although the *Historic Towns Atlas* preferred to see a much larger 'castle', of about ten acres, straddling Earl Street along both sides.[51] In itself, it might be thought that plan unit (I) has a motte-and-bailey shape, with the 'motte' represented by the outline of St Michael's churchyard (the 'Old Cathedral' of today) and the 'bailey' fanning out towards the south. However, by considering the morphology of plan unit (I) along with evidence for the medieval topography and toponymy of Earl Street, what emerges is a castle and town sharing defences of at least twelfth-century date, the outlines of which became fossilized into the pattern of streets and plots of plan unit (I). By the thirteenth century the castle's defences had nearly disappeared from Coventry's townscape, but subsequent property development took place in such a way that the morphological outline of the twelfth-century 'castle-town' was preserved. Its continued ghostly pre-

[48] In the 1270s the Red Ditch is recorded as a *side*-abuttal of a property belonging to Henry Baker in Earl Street (Coss, *Early Records*, deeds 219 and 220). This suggests that a stretch of the ditch ran north-south across Earl Street to connect with the northern and southern ditch alignments. A north-south ditch east of Much Park Street was located in assessment work in the 1970s according to Wright, 'Much Park Street', 31. The course of the ditch across the western end of Earl Street is less certain, although in the Pittancer's Rental of 1410–11 one of the properties on the east side of Greyfriar's Lane extended 'up to the Red Ditch' (Gooder *et al.*, *Pittancer's Rental*, 12). There is also documentary evidence that the southern ditch alignment (the 'town ditch') extended further west, along the southern side of properties fronting Smithford Street. This ditch crossed Greyfriar's Lane where the road splits into two (to form Warwick Lane and Cheylesmore Lane), the site of which was marked by a bar in *c.* 1270: see Coss, *Early Records*, deeds 66 (*c.* 1270) and 392 (1307).

A supposed letter of Hugh II, earl of Chester, refers to *latam portam* and a deed of 1157 refers to *portam australem*: see Coss, *Early Records*, deeds 7 and 178; Coss, *Langley Cartulary*, deed 214. It should be noted that until the later thirteenth century there was no southern exit from Coventry *via* Much Park Street, and that instead the main route to the south was along Gosford Street. On this see K.D. Lilley, 'Urban design in medieval Coventry: the planning of Much and Little Park Street in the Earl of Chester's fee', *Midland History*, 23 (1998), 1–20.

[49] The different interpretations of Coventry's early defensive circuits are clearly summarized in Wright, 'Much Park Street', 11–13, figure 4.

[50] P.B. Chatwin, 'Castles in Warwickshire', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 67 (1951), 6.

[51] For the *Historic Towns Atlas* view of the castle site, see map 4 following the essay by J.C. Lancaster, in Lobel, *Historic Towns*.

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sence in the skeleton of Coventry's town plan reflects the often adaptive form of townscape change in both the medieval and early modern periods. It is because of their characteristically conservative nature that streets and plots shown on nineteenth-century cartographic sources can be used as a basis to map the formation of medieval urban landscapes.

Mapping the morphogenesis of medieval Coventry

The preceding discussion is based on just one of Coventry's twenty-one plan units. By mapping archaeological and historical information on to each of the plan units and piecing them all together, relating one plan unit with another, the plan analysis can be interpreted as a map showing how Coventry's urban landscape evolved during the Middle Ages.[52] In order to understand the historical significance of the Earl Street area of Coventry it is necessary to place what we know of plan unit (I) alongside neighbouring plan units, and so to conclude the paper I shall do this and examine how the Earl Street plan unit fits into a broader pattern of landscape change in medieval Coventry. By doing so it will become clear that at the same time as transformative changes were taking place within the castle town (during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), whole new areas were also being deliberately laid out to expand Coventry further and further outwards.

Since plan unit (I) is located at the centre of Coventry's plan, it might be thought that it represents the first stage in the development of the town (see Figure 3). Certainly, plan units to the south, east and west of Earl Street all seem to 'flow' away from unit (I), and therefore perhaps indicate subsequent stages of accretive development. The plan units associated with Coventry's main east-west street (which runs through the 'castle town') together form a definable 'plan region' (units I, II, IV–IX, XV–XVIII, XIX), which is separate and distinct from Coventry's other plan units (which instead cling closely to a road that runs north-south, through the market area, plan unit XI, see Figures 2 and 3). The presence of these two plan-regions mirrors the geography of Coventry's two principal medieval landholdings. The morphological divide between the two plan-regions follows the boundary that separated the part of Coventry held by the earls of Chester (the 'earl's fee') from the part held by the prior of St Mary's (the 'prior's fee'). The latter was centred on St Mary's priory which had been founded (as an abbey) by Earl Leofric and his wife Godiva in *c*. 1040.[53] The prior's fee equated

[52] A long process perhaps, but one that is not as time-consuming as reconstructing medieval urban topography from sequences of medieval and post-medieval property deeds and rentals: see S. Kelly, E. Rutledge and M. Tillyard, *Men of Property: An Analysis of the Norwich Enrolled Deeds 1285–1311* (Norwich, 1983); R.H. Leech, *The Topography of Medieval and Early Modern Bristol*, Bristol Record Society, 48 (1997); Keene, *Survey of Medieval Winchester*.

[53] On the prior's fee and the morphological development of the northern plan-region see

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with the area of Holy Trinity parish and in turn this is reflected in the distinct form of the northern plan region. To the south, the 'earl's fee' equated with the area of St Michael's parish and belonged to the Norman earls of Chester. The historical geography of the two fees and their particular urban forms reveal how Coventry developed outwards from two seigneurial foci, one centred on the abbey and the other on the earl's castle-town.

When the earls of Chester acquired Coventry is not recorded, but it may have been about 1100, at around the same time that the abbey of St Mary became an episcopal seat.[54] In 1073 Archbishop Lanfranc decreed that bishop's seats should be in towns, and the episcopal see was moved from Chester to Coventry.[55] Chester of course was the honorial seat of the marcher earls of Chester, who had been instated there by William soon after the Norman Conquest. Coventry was certainly part of a widespread collection of estates held by the earls of Chester by the early twelfth century, and was one of a number of other towns held by them, such as Leek in Staffordshire and Rhuddlan in north Wales. Coventry and Chester were the earl's most important English urban centres, and it is perhaps not without significance that Coventry lies halfway between Chester and London.[56] In this context, although Domesday Book records no 'borough' at Coventry, it seems likely that by the end of the eleventh century it had become an important place, both strategically and commercially.[57] Unfortunately, eleventh-century Coventry is a rather shadowy place as far as the historical record is concerned. Certainly the abbey had been founded by Earl Leofric in the 1040s, and perhaps the Mercian earl also had his own residence in Coventry.[58] In 1066, Coventry was in the hands of Nicholas, but Domesday Book records that five hides at Coventry were held by Countess Godiva before the Conquest, and it seems that in the period 1066 to 1086 the estate had yet to be granted as a Norman feudatory.[59] Anglo-Saxon Coventry may well have been an important place for the Mercian earls, since it lay halfway between the two pre-Conquest *burhs* of Warwick and Tamworth. Tamworth was the

K.D. Lilley, 'Trading places: monastic initiative and the development of high medieval Coventry', in T.R. Slater and G. Rosser (eds), *The Church in the Medieval Town* (Aldershot, 1998), 177–208; K.D. Lilley, 'Coventry's topographical development: the impact of the priory', in G. Demidowicz (ed.), *Coventry's First Cathedral* (Stamford, 1994), 72–96. On the foundation of St Mary's see J. Hunt, 'Piety, prestige or politics? The House of Leofric and the foundation and patronage of Coventry priory', in Demidowicz, *Coventry's First Cathedral*, 97–117; Coss, *Early Records*, xix–xxv.

[54] Coss, *Early Records*, xvi; Davis, 'Early history', 17; M.J. Franklyn, 'The Bishops of Coventry and Lichfield, *c*.1072–1208', in Demidowicz, *Coventry's First Cathedral*, 118–38.

[55] *Ibid*., 118–19.

[56] See C.P. Lewis, 'The formation of the Honor of Chester, 1066–1100', in A.T. Thacker (ed.), *The Earldom of Chester and its Charters* (Chester, 1991), 37–68.

[57] Davis, 'Early history', 19.

[58] See Hunt, 'Piety, prestige or politics?', 112–16.

[59] J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book, 23. Warwickshire* (Chichester, 1976), 15.6, note.

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seat of the Mercian earldom in the eleventh century, whilst Warwick was founded in the early tenth as a *burh* at the southern boundary of Mercia.[60]

If the earls had had a residence at Coventry before 1066 no remains of it have been found, but then for that matter very little of the abbey's pre-Conquest archaeology has been recovered. In the early thirteenth century the foundations of the Benedictine priory were dug through earlier levels, and so the exact layout of Leofric's abbey of St Mary is unknown, though no doubt it lay directly beneath the later priory.[61] Indeed, it may be wondered why the site of the abbey was chosen, since it occupied a steeply falling slope between the River Sherbourne and Earl Street (plan unit IX on Figure 3);[62] unless, perhaps, there was something to the south that prevented Leofric from locating the abbey there?

The deep twelfth-century castle ditches north of Earl Street no doubt relate to the period when Coventry was a focus of conflict in the civil war of Stephen's reign between Ranulf, earl of Chester, and Robert Marmion. Contemporary chronicles record how Marmion attacked the earl in a siege after fortifying the priory with ditches.[63] Conventual buildings were used as strongpoints elsewhere during the civil war period, and the close juxtaposition of the priory and the castle at Coventry was clearly seen by Marmion to be advantageous for mounting his attack.[64] Unfortunately for him, however, as William of Newburgh records, Marmion fell into one of his own ditches and his head was hacked off.[65] Following Stephen's reign, the castle seems to have lost its military role. Indeed, it has even been suggested that the castle at Coventry was only a temporary feature of the mid-twelfth century.[66] However, the position of St Michael's church within the castle enclosure would suggest a more important and long-lived role of this area in Coventry's early history. Its dedication is often associated with high and

[60] M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), 146–53, 155–8.

[61] See R.K. Morris, 'The lost cathedral priory church of St Mary, Coventry', in Demidowicz, *Coventry's First Cathedral*, 16–66; B. Hobley with M.W. Lambert, 'Excavations at the cathedral and Benedictine priory of St Mary, Coventry', *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society*, 84 (1971), 45–139, on 62 and 90.

[62] It would be more usual to find conventual buildings on the south side of a priory church.

[63] According to Coss, *Early Records*, 8, 'in or before 1144 Marmion fortified Coventry priory presumably in order to lay siege to Ranulf's castle. In September 1144 he was killed during a foray against the earl [of Chester] who had appeared in force presumably to relieve the castle. Arrested in August 1146 the earl purchased his freedom by surrendering his castles. After his release he attempted to recover Coventry but was unsuccessful'. See R.H.C. Davis, 'An unknown Coventry charter', *English Historical Review*, 86 (1971), 533–45; K.R. Potter (ed.), *Gesta Stephani* (Oxford, 1976), 199–200.

[64] Davis, 'Unknown charter', 535, note 2, suggests 'the situation in Coventry would … have been very similar to that in Hereford in 1140 when Geoffrey Talbot fortified the cathedral in an attempt to capture the neighbouring castle'.

[65] *Ibid*., 535, citing William of Newburgh in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, 4 vols (London, 1884–89,), vol. 1, 47.

[66] D.F. Renn, *Norman Castles in Great Britain* (London, 1968), 160.

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defended sites and in the earl's charter of 1153, conferring St Michael's to the priory, a long list of fourteen chapelries are recorded.[67] This suggests that St Michael's was an important and perhaps ancient foundation. Certainly St Michael's later functioned as the parish church of the earl's fee, and it may also have once acted as their castle chapel.[68]

The earl's castle had been lost from Coventry's townscape by *c*. 1200, the time when Bailey Lane is first recorded and when properties are known to have been developed on the site. Also at around this time the earl of Chester's residence at nearby Cheylesmore first appears in Coventry's archaeological and historical record (plan unit VII on Figure 3).[69] Cheylesmore manor lies to the south of Earl Street, close to what was the road to Warwick in the Middle Ages, and adjacent to the earl's former park.[70] The earl's park may indeed have once been linked to his castle, as a large plot extending south from the castle enclosure crosses Earl Street (thus piercing the town ditch) and might preserve an entrance that allowed direct access into the park from the castle, presumably before the development of Much and Little Park Street took place to the south of Earl Street. In fact, the area lying south of the town ditch (that is plan units V, VI, VII and VIII), appears to have been developed from the late twelfth century onwards, the time at which the earls seem to have made their decision to move from their principal residence in Coventry from the castle site in the town centre to a new location closer to the park at the fringe of the town.[71]

By 1249, one of the earl's successors, Robert de Montalt, founded a Franciscan friary adjacent to their manor at Cheylesmore.[72] This was after one of the earls, probably Earl Hugh, had used part of his park to

[67] Coss, *Early Records*, 11. The chapelries listed are Ansty, Shilton, Wyken, Binley, Whitley, Pinley, Stoke, Stivichall, Exhall, Foleshill, Keresley, Whoberley, Spon and 'Bisseleia'. For the spatial significance of these and some suggestions that these dependencies, along with those of Holy Trinity parish, define a pre-Conquest *regio* at Coventry, see Lilley, 'Medieval Coventry', 150–5, 158–66.

[68] Chatwin, 'Warwickshire castles', 6.

[69] The first specific reference to the manor at Cheylesmore is as late as 1249 when Roger de Montalt excluded the transferral of the manor house to the prior: see Coss, *Early Records*, xxiv–v, deed 22a. Recent excavations at the manor have suggested an earlier date (*c*. 1200) for initial occupation of the site: see *West Midlands Archaeology*, 35 (1992), 67–8. Also see Stephens, *Coventry*, 18–19.

[70] The curvilinear outline of the earl's park appears very clearly on the first edition six-inch map. Its early history is obscure; the earliest references are from the mid-twelfth century (Coss, *Early Records*, 12), but the etymology of Cheylesmore ('marsh of the pole') may indicate that the area had been marked-out well before the Conquest: see M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, 53.

[71] It is surely no coincidence that the demise of the castle takes place at about the same time as the manor of Cheylesmore appears: see Lilley, 'Urban design', 13–14, 16; Stephens, *Coventry*, 18.

[72] As with the manor of Cheylesmore, the first definite date for the presence of the Franciscan friary at Coventry is de Montalt's grant of 1249: see Coss, *Early Records*, deed 22a. On the friary see W.G. Fretton, 'Memorials of the Franciscans of Grey Friars, Coventry', *Birmingham and Midland Institute Archaeology Section Transactions*, 9 (1879), 34–53.

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lay out a new suburb (plan unit V on Figure 3).[73] This suburb extended along Little and Much Park Streets but although its coherent layout tells us that it was certainly established as a single phase of development, it was not until Much Park Street was extended southwards (to form a new exit from Coventry in the 1290s) that the suburb was successfully occupied by property-holders.[74] It may well be that the redevelopment of the earl's castle led to the slow take-up of properties in the Much and Little Park Street area, especially since at that time the main route through the earl's fee was Gosford Street, Earl Street and Smithford Street. Further accretive expansion along this long east-west street is reflected in other plan units, stretched out along its length. Since the Much and Little Park Street development is known to be no earlier than the mid-twelfth century in origin, it seems likely that the plan units east and west of Earl Street, that is east and west of the earl's 'castle-town', date to before this time. For example, in Gosford Street, plan unit (IV), one excavated plot boundary was found to overlie (and preserve the line of) ridge and furrow cultivation strips.[75] In this context the plan units along the street through the earl's fee may be envisaged as early suburban expansion, laid out on former field-land outside the gates of the earl's 'castle-town'.

Finally, there is the question of how the earl's 'castle-town' relates to the prior's fee, for it is the juxtaposition of plan units along the boundary of the two fees that suggests the origins of plan unit (I) are pre-Conquest. The precinct of the abbey is reflected in the plan analysis by the outline of plan unit (X), and elsewhere I have argued that the market area outside the priory gates, plan unit (XI) to the west, has its origins before the Norman conquest as an urban venture initiated by the abbey of St Mary (see Figure 3).[76] The sloping position of the abbey site has already been noted, and the close spatial relationship between the market-place and the abbey gate (that led into the precinct from the west), along with contemporary written evidence that properties along Ironmonger Row (in unit XI) were 'situated on the ground part of the original endowment' of St Mary's, makes it highly likely that the market and abbey were developed at around the same time, in the middle of the eleventh century, on land granted by Leofric.[77] To the south, therefore, the land on which the earl of Chester's 'castle-town' later stood was presumably

[73] On the development of this area of Coventry see Lilley, 'Urban design', 1–2.
[74] *Ibid*., 10–11.
[75] *West Midlands Archaeology*, 30 (1987), 64–5. See also Lilley, 'Medieval Coventry', 270–4.
[76] Lilley, 'Coventry's urban topography', 88–94; Lilley, 'Trading places', 185–91.
[77] Three contiguous properties in Ironmonger Row (plan unit XI) are recorded in the Pittancer's Rental of 1410–11 as 'situated on the ground part of the original endowment of the … Cathedral church' (*in solo fundacionis ecclesie Cathedralis …*): Gooder *et al*., *Pittancer's Rental*, 31–2. Also worth noting in this respect is a letter of *c*. 1072–85 from Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, to Peter, Bishop of Chester, the then Abbot of Coventry, who was said to have pulled down the houses belonging to the abbey: H. Clover and M. Gibson (eds), *The Letters of Archbishop Lanfranc* (Oxford, 1979), letter 27.

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kept under Leofric's control once he had granted a piece of land to found the abbey. Speculatively, then, the ghost of a Mercian residence and an associated settlement may be preserved in the outline of plan unit (I).

As with the remains of Leofric's abbey, the physical remains of such a Mercian secular site at Coventry has eluded archaeologists, but considering the scale of successive phases of redevelopment on the site of the castle during the Middle Ages, first in the civil war of Stephen's reign and subsequently in the opening up of the site for property development, this absence is not surprising. Perhaps the vestiges of Mercian Coventry are still concealed under the area of plan unit (I). Few excavations have been undertaken in this part of the city and those that have relate mainly to the former ditch-lines, where greater disturbances are likely to have disrupted earlier levels. For now, though, the morphological record revealed by plan analysis, along with the patchy evidence of historical and archeological records, provides the only way of mapping and understanding the morphogenesis of Coventry's medieval urban landscape, as is the case with many of Europe's medieval towns and cities. In this context, the plan analysis technique provides an important multidisciplinary method, for the study of urban history in general and for mapping the spatial evolution of medieval urban landscapes in particular, as Conzen himself argued over thirty years ago.[78]

[78] Conzen, 'Study of town plans', 119.

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